

## Message Text

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ACTION PRS-01

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9623

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 4016

FOR AMBASSADOR ROBERT ANDERSON, S/PRS, FROM AMBASSADOR DEAN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EAID, SOPN, CB, US

SUBJ: ERRONEOUS UPI STORY ABOUT AIRLIFTED AMERICAN RICE

REF: PHNOM PENH 3846

1. THE ACTUAL TEXT OF THE MARCH 3 UPI STORY (REFTEL) WHICH HAS CAUSED SO MUCH DAMAGE HAS JUST BECOME AVAILABLE TO US IN THE MARCH 4 EDITION OF THE PACIFIC STARS AND STRIPES. THE TWO LEAD PARAGRAPHS READ AS FOLLOWS:

"PHNOM PENH (UPI)--THE CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT HAS ORDERED ALL RICE CARRIED INTO PHNOM PENH BY THE AMERICAN AIRLIFT WITHHELD FROM STRAVING CIVILIANS AND GIVEN ONLY TO THE MILITARY, A SENIOR OFFICIAL SAID SUNDAY.

THE DECISION THURSDAY BY PRESIDENT LON NOL MEANT THERE WAS NO RELIEF IN SIGHT FOR STARVING RESIDENTS OF THE BESIEGED CAPITAL WHO HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN PROVISIONS SINCE THE FOOD MARKETS CLOSED."

2. AN EXHAUSTIVE CHECK BY THIS MISSION HAS PRODUCED ABSOLUTELY NO BASIS FOR ANY OF THESE ALLEGATIONS. THERE IS NO DOUBT IN OUR MINDS THAT THE STORY IS COMPLETELY FALSE. EXPLANATORY STATEMENTS AND DENIALS HAVE BEEN ISSUED BY THE EMBASSY HERE AND BY THE DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON. BUT THE DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE, AND AS IN  
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MOST SUCH CASES IT IS IRREPARABLE.

3. WE HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY LEARNED THAT THIS STORY WAS HASTILY THROWN TOGETHER BY ALAN DAWSON, UPI BUREAU CHIEF IN SAIGON, WHILE HE WAS HERE COVERING THE HECTIC, EIGHT-HOUR VISIT OF THE U.S. CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION TO CAMBODIA ON MARCH 1. THE PHNOM PENH UPI OFFICE IS NORMALLY REPRESENTED BY A KHMER LOCAL EMPLOYEE ONLY. DAWSON'S "SOURCES" ARE UNKNOWN TO US, AND ARE AS SUSPECT AS HIS STORY WAS INACCURATE.

4. THIS ERRONEOUS STORY HAS CAUSED INCALCULABLE DAMAGE TO OUR CAUSE IN CAMBODIA. IT WAS PICKED UP AND DISSEMINATED UNDER BANNER HEADLINES IN SOME AMERICAN AND FOREIGN JOURNALS. MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WERE STIMULATED BY IT TO ISSUE UNFAVORABLE STATEMENTS ABOUT FURTHER AID TO CAMBODIA. THE STORY FALSIFIED AND DISTORTED THE IMAGE OF THE GKR, ESTABLISHING A PICTURE OF A TOTALLY BASE, CORRUPT REGIME UNWORTHY OF AMERICAN SUPPORT.

5. IN THE SAME EDITION OF THE PACIFIC STARS AND STRIPES THE EDITORIAL SECTION CONTAINED ANOTHER ARTICLE ON CAMBODIA, BYLINED ALAN DAWSON, UNDER THE HEADLINE "FALL OF CAMBODIA SEEN AS A CERTAINTY." THE LEAD READ AS FOLLOWS:

"SAIGON (UPI)-- THE U.S. CAN BUY TIME FOR THE PRO-AMERICAN GOVERNMENT OF PHNOM PENH, BUT THE FALL OF CAMBODIA TO THE COMMUNISTS WITHIN A YEAR IS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN,"

6. DAWSON HAS THE RIGHT AS A "JOURNALIST" TO EXPRESS ANY VIEW HE CARES TO ABOUT THE FUTURE COURSE OF EVENTS IN CAMBODIA. TIME WILL TELL WHETHER HIS PREDICTIONS PROVE ACCURATE. WHAT DAWSON DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO IS TO FILE A STORY CONTAINING ALLEGATIONS WHICH ARE COMPLETELY INACCURATE AND WHICH MAY MATERIALLY CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASING THE ODDS IN FAVOR OF HIS PREDICTION.

7. REGARDLESS OF DAWSON'S ETHICS AS A JOURNALIST, THE MANAGEMENT OF UPI SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT ITS REPUTATION AS A PURVEYOR OF "NEWS". THE ITEM FILED BY DAWSON AND DISSEMINATED AROUND THE WORLD BY UPI ALLEGING THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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THE GKR (LON NOL) HAD ISSUED AN ORDER RESTRICTING THE DISTRIBUTION OF U.S. RICE AIRLIFTED INTO PHNOM PENH BY THE USG TO THE MILITARY IS A PLAIN AND SIMPLE SLANDER WHICH SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO STAND UNCORRECTED. AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME THAT UPI HAS FILED IRRESPONSIBLE, INACCURATE STORIES FROM PHNOM PENH. IF UPI WISHES TO DISSEMINATE MR. DAWSON'S PREDICTION OF THE INEVITABLE COLLAPSE OF

CAMBODIA, THAT IS ITS PRIVILEGE; BUT IT HAS NO RIGHT TO ASSIST IN BRINGING ABOUT THAT COLLAPSE BY PUBLISHING FALSEHOODS.

8. I LEAVE IT TO YOU TO DECIDE WHAT IF ANYTHING YOU WISH TO DO ABOUT THIS SITUATION, BUT I SHOULD THINK THAT AT A MINIMUM THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD REQUEST UPI TO PUT OUT OVER ITS WIRE A RETRACTION OR CORRECTION OF ITS INACCURATE STORY ABOUT THE AMERICAN AIRLIFTED RICE. I SUPPOSE IT IS TOO MUCH TO EXPECT THAT THEY INCLUDE AN APOLOGY, BUT I DO BELIEVE THAT THEY OWE IT TO THEIR SUBSCRIBERS, AS MUCH AS TO US, TO CORRECT THEIR OWN MISTAKES.

9. THE TRUE FACTS ABOUT THE AMERICAN RICE AIRLIFT ARE CONTAINED IN REFTEL.  
DEAN

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## Message Attributes

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